

On behalf of the American Consulate General in Jerusalem, I want to personally thank all of our friends who have shared their grief with us as we mourn our fallen colleagues -- Glen Doherty, Tyrone Woods, Sean Smith, and Ambassador Chris Stevens -- whose lives were tragically cut short in Benghazi, Libya on September 11.

The loss was personal for us. Ambassador Stevens served at the American Consulate General in Jerusalem for four years, from 2002 through 2006. He was a friend of mine, just as he was a friend to so many in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Chris had a passion for his work and for this region that led him to embrace Arab culture and the Arabic language. In Libya, he worked tirelessly to help the Libyan people during and after their popular revolution, a struggle that toppled a tyrant.

Chris was a true diplomat, and in the wake of his death, the great outpouring of sympathy has been truly moving. We have received messages from all levels of the Palestinian Authority, dozens have come to the Consulate General to sign our condolence book, and we have received countless e-mail and Facebook messages. U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton was genuinely moved by the condolence letters she received from President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad.

Disgusting and reprehensible – that is how Secretary Clinton described the video that ignited violence throughout the region, and was so grotesquely exploited by terrorists in Benghazi. The maker of the film denigrated a great religion, aimed to provoke rage, and tried to drive a wedge between peace-loving peoples of the world. There is absolutely no justification for this violence, and I am heartened by the compassion of those who have sent condolence messages, many of which acknowledge that true practitioners of religion, like true diplomats, will choose the path of peace and justice over violence and fanaticism.

In the United States we have a long tradition of free expression and we do not stop individual citizens from expressing their views; we must recognize that with this freedom comes responsibility just as we must acknowledge that violence in response to speech is not acceptable.

The United States is a nation founded on religious tolerance and respect for religious beliefs; we hold them to be fundamental values inseparable from freedom and liberty. The United States is stronger because we are the home of people of all faiths, including millions of Muslims. We must not allow a tiny minority to provoke conflict among religions, countries and cultures. Thank you to our

Palestinian friends for demonstrating to us in a time of great sorrow that our friendship is as strong as ever. We will long remember the kind words and actions of our friends here who have shared in our sadness and offered us their support in our time of grief.